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ABSTRACT

Research has compared employed and non-employed women in the areas of depression, reported psychological problems, alienation, role conflict, marital problems, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and anxiety. A review of this research generally revealed no differences between employed and non-employed women. Those studies which reported differences tended to show that employed women experienced less psychological stress than did non-employed women. The prediction that employment would be disabilitating was not substantiated by the research reviewed. While there were no main effects, congruence emerged as a key factor which moderated stress. Personal desire, societal norms, and husband's preference about a woman's employment status have been studied to determine if they combined with actual employment status to affect stress. Although the research is relatively limited, it appears that a conflict in one of these areas may produce higher levels of psychological stress. The research studies reviewed differed from one another in several ways: types of groups of women studied; definition of employment status; measures used; variety of dependent variables; and underlying assumptions. The entire area of investigation would be more cohesive and definitive if replication studies were performed on some of the more significant research. (Author/NB)

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MARRIED WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT STATUS, AND STRESS: A CRITICAL REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

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MARRIED WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT STATUS, AND STRESS: A CRITICAL REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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by

Barbara Ann Deborah Conway Schneider

May 1987

ABSTRACT

MARRIED WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT STATUS, AND STRESS:
A CRITICAL REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

Barbara Ann Deborah Conway Schneider

Empirical research in the area of married women, employment status, and stress is reviewed. Employed and non-employed women were compared in the areas of depression, reported psychological problems, alienation, role conflict, marital problems, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and anxiety. Generally, no differences were found between the two groups of women. Studies which found differences tended to show that employed women experienced less psychological stress. The prediction that employment would be disabilitating is not substantiated. While there are no main effects, congruence is a key factor which moderates stress. Congruence between a woman's actual employment status and her personal desires, husband's preference, and societal norms is discussed with respect to its moderation of stress associated with employment status. Incongruence is found to be disabling. A general model which emphasizes congruence as a major factor is presented.

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MARRIED WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT STATUS, AND STRESS:
A CRITICAL REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

Our society has been in the midst of rapid change over the past few decades. Men and women have been questioning their roles more than at any other time in history. Research has been focusing on the effects which these new role variations have on society, on marriages, and on individuals. Much of this research over the past three decades has centered on women's roles in the home and in the job market. Included in this research has been the study of the psychological effects of employed versus non-employed married women.

While a large amount of literature has been generated, it has been scattered, lacking cohesiveness. A few literature reviews have attempted to consolidate the research and draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of employment status on women (Warr and Parry, 1982b; Wright, 1978; Yogev, 1983). However, the reveiws which have been done in this area have centered primarily on two areas: the physiological/biological effects of employment status on women (Haw, 1982; Stellman, 1978), and the effects which the employment status of a woman has on family life (Gove and Peterson, 1980; Smith 1981). No literature reviews on the psychological effects of employment status on women were found. This paper will undertake just such a review.

There are three main tasks in undertaking a review of the empirical research in this area. The initial task is to evaluate the literature in order to determine whether or not employment status in and of itself is an added and significant

stressor for women. The second task is to determine what might be the factors contributing to the individual differences which are observed in the stress levels for married women. The third task is to identify a direction for future research in order to better understand the issues involved in the area of married women, employment status, and psychological stress.

The first section of this paper examines the conclusions which researchers have drawn concerning the differential effects of employment versus non-employment on a woman's level of psychological stress. This section emphasizes those studies which have compared these two groups. The most frequently studied dependent variables will be reviewed.

The second section considers the research which evaluates individual responses to employment status and its impact on a married woman's psychological stress level. This section emphasizes those studies which examined individual differences. The effect of the degree of congruence between a woman's personal desires, her husband's preference, and the societal norms around her with actual employment status are examined.

Directions for future research and conclusions are covered in the third section of the paper. This section considers and discusses conceptual factors which need improvement. In addition, areas which have not been investigated in the literature or need further research will be discussed.

It has been noted (Spitz and Huber, 1980; Yogev, 1983) that the cultural values and thus the research and literature in the area of women and work has changed dramatically in the past ten

to fifteen years. Therefore, only those articles which were published from the late 1970's to the present are reviewed. Secondly, only empirical articles are considered. This will enable more precise conclusions to be drawn from the data. Thirdly, the primary source of information for this paper is research which dealt with married women, whether they were parents or not. However, some general studies on women in which no distinctions were made concerning marital or parental status have been included when they can make a meaningful contribution to the stated aim of the paper.

THE EFFECTS OF EMPLOYMENT VERSUS NON-EMPLOYMENT ON MARRIED WOMEN

As a result of the surge of women entering the work force, interest has been sparked in comparing the psychological stress levels of women who are employed with those who are non-employed. In part, investigation into this area has been to determine if one status was inherently more stressful than the other status. The areas of depression, psychological well-being, alienation, role conflict, marital adjustment, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and anxiety have all been investigated, as potential indicators of variations in stress induced by employment status.

Depression

It is generally accepted that there are higher rates of depression in women than in men (Clancy and Gove, 1974; Rosenfield, 1980). The debate over the causes for this difference has been a long one. There are those who hypothesize that there are some physical and biochemical explanations

(Weissman and Klerman, 1977) as well as those who postulate that there are more sociological explanations (Clancy and Gove, 1974; Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1974, 1976, 1977; Gove, 1978; Gove and Tudor, 1973). Researching the differences between women who are employed and women who are non-employed would appear to provide an important contribution to this ongoing debate, and in addition, contribute to the discussion of the effects of employment on women.

As Rosenfield (1980) has noted elsewhere, several studies have compared the effects of the wife's employment status on depression levels for both herself and her spouse. As measured both physiologically and psychologically, women who were employed were equally depressed as non-employed women (Radoff, 1975). Likewise, husbands of women who were employed outside of the home had similar levels of depression as husbands of women who were non-employed (Keith and Schafer, 1980). This would indicate that employment status does not affect the depression level of the wife or the husband. While depression levels were the same for both the employed and non-employed groups of women, individual differences within the groups were found. Upon investigation, these differences were found to be dependent on the degree of congruence between a woman's personal choice, her husband's preference for the role she has, and her actual employment status (Ross, Mirowski, and Huber, 1983).

Studies which have investigated women's depression levels without including the effects on their husbands' psychological stress have found similar results. As a group, employed women

were neither more nor less depressed than non-employed women (Gove and Tudor, 1973; Krause, 1982; Warr and Parry, 1982a). These results included midlife women (Baruch and Barnett, 1986), as well as Mexican-American women (Krause and Markides, 1985), indicating that perhaps these results generalize to various populations.

When the socio-economic factor was included in these studies, the results change. Non-employed women having lower socio-economic status were found to be significantly more depressed than their employed counterparts. It has been hypothesized that employment for these women may protect them from some types of psychological stress (Mostow and Newberry, 1975; Newberry, Weissman, and Myers, 1979). These findings were corraborated by Ferree (1984) in her study on life satisfaction which specifically investigated the differences between social classes. For women in the lower socio-economic class, employment may provide the benefit of extra income which would help to reduce the psychological stress which they might otherwise experience without that income.

Two other studies found results which indicate that there may be significant differences between employed and non-employed women on measures of depression. Gove and Geerkin (1977) found that in general, employed women were less depressed and had overall better mental health than non-employed women. The level of loneliness, the need to have time for oneself, and the sense of demand from the environment were hypothesized to be indicators of depression. Women who were non-employed had

higher levels of loneliness, a greater need for time to oneself, and an increased sense of demand from the environment. The second study by Kessler and McRae (1982) found that in a national survey of 1086 women, those who were employed were found to have less depression and anxiety, higher self-esteem, and better physical health.

While these results indicate that perhaps there are significant differences between employed and non-employed women, neither of these studies has taken into serious consideration an important factor which may have intervened in the research. It might be that the sample was biased due to the fact that when depression becomes intense enough it often is debilitating. This may mean that the non-employed groups included women who were depressed for reasons other than employment status. It may be that some women are non-employed precisely because they are depressed or having psychological symptoms which are preventing them from working.

In conclusion, despite the breadth of definition in the concept of depression and the types of populations studied, the majority of the studies found no differences in depression levels between employed and non-employed women. The researchers expected to find that employment would increase a married woman's level of depression. Two of the studies found results which were in the opposite direction than was expected. They discovered that employment may actually decrease depression levels in some married women. The data which indicated that employment for women in the lower socio-economic classes had a

positive impact on depression levels raises issues for future research.

Reported Psychological Problems

The area of reported psychological problems covers a variety of levels of functioning. While this area includes some studies which examined depression, for the most part these studies have investigated problems other than depression.

Employed and non-employed women were not found to differ in levels of social adjustment, mental status, or general psychological functioning. When overall psychiatric symptoms, depressive symptoms, diagnosable psychiatric disorders, or treatment for emotional problems were evaluated, no differences between employed and non-employed women were found (Newberry, et al., 1979). In addition, there were no differences between the two groups in past history of psychiatric symptoms or treatment (Yogev, 1983).

When examining the incidence of minor psychiatric morbidity, no differences were revealed based on employment status. However, the researchers did find differences based on marital status. Single women, employed or non-employed, had significantly higher levels of minor psychiatric morbidity than did married women (Finlay-Jones and Burvill, 1979). This would indicate that there are factors which are of greater importance to a woman's psychological functioning than employment status alone.

The majority of this research seems to indicate that there are no differences in the psychological symptomology between

employed and non-employed women. Employment status does not appear to affect the psychological well-being of women. What does appear to affect women is their marital status. These findings reflect how our society has changed over the past few decades. In the context of our society While it may have ben appropriate fifteen or twenty years ago to ask whether or not employment was harmful to married women, this question now appears to be irrelavant. Individual differences, such as marital status, appear to have a greater affect on womens' psychological well-being than employment status. What appears to be a more relevant task today is to define the moderators of stress for each women.

Alienation

Alienation, or feelings of loneliness and isolation, was another area in which researchers have examined differences between employed and non-employed women. It would seem that there should be differences between these two groups of women in the experienced levels of loneliness, and isolation. This might be especially true when the lack of interaction which non-employed women often experience during child rearing years is taken into account. Despite this assumption, several studies found that when the effects of class were controlled as a variable, there were no differences found between employed and non-employed women in their levels of alienation (Gove and Tudor, 1973).

Level of companionship in marriages may be an area which might indicated a sense of alienation for women. In a 1980

study, Locksley found that employed and non-employed women reported an equal amount of companionship with their spouses.

Some studies did find differences in alienation between employed and non-employed women. Lovell-Troy (1983) found that the role of housewife, which both employed and non-employed women share, can produce a sense of alienation. Overall, her results indicated that there were no differences between employed and non-employed women in levels of alienation. However, women who were non-employed experienced greater alienation if they had more children and if they were members of large urban communities. These were not factors which appeared to affect employed women. These women may be more alienated because they are limited in the amount of social contact due to the high demands which several children would place on them and the impersonalized nature of urban areas.

In a study by Gove and Geerkin (1977), the effects of employment on the mental health of men and women was examined. The data was taken from a survey conducted in Chicago on the effects of overcrowding. One of the questions in the study was aimed at finding out whether or not the subject had frequent feelings of loneliness. In comparing employment status differences in women, the researchers found that employed women feel more loneliness than non-employed women.

The results in this area were mixed. Two well designed studies found that there were no differences between the two groups of women, and two found differences. In the two studies which found differences, one found that employed women were less

alienated and the other study found the opposite to be true. This indicates that further research is needed to investigate the effects which children and community size have on married women's alienation.

Role Conflict

Role overload, role stress, and role conflict are highly related concepts and were frequently used interchangeably in the literature. They each involve the concept of psychological stress experienced as a result of involvement in multiple roles. Role overload was most often defined in the literature as the stress which is experienced from a large number of roles. Role stress is very similar, but emphasizes the stress from being involved in more than one role and does not necessarily include the idea of having too many roles. One may experience role stress with having only a few roles if these roles are highly exclusive of each other and highly demanding. Role conflict is a term most often used to describe the stress from differing and sometimes conflicting roles in which a person is involved. In this paper, the term role conflict will be used to indicate all three concepts. Intuitively, it would appear that there would be differences in role conflict between employed and non-employed women as a result of the assumed differences in the number of roles in which each are involved.

Most employed women indicated that they experience some degree of role conflict (Gray, 1983). Barnett and Baruch (1986) found that as the number of roles increases, so does role conflict, but only to moderate levels for both groups of women.

Once this level is reached, the single most important aspect affecting a woman's experience of role conflict and overload was found to be the quality rather than the quantity of the roles in which she was involved. For example, if a woman had a negative employment or parenting situation she would experience high levels of role conflict. (Barnett and Baruch, 1985, 1986).

These results are corraborated by Yogev (1983) in her review of related literature since the 1960's. She found that the research in the 60's and early 70's indicated that there was more role conflict for women who were employed. As society's values began to change, so did the results of the research. In the 70's, it appeared that role conflict was no longer a function of employment status and that other factors such as a woman's role expectations influenced the level of role conflict. Women no longer saw employment status as an either/or choice, but began to be involved in the job market in addition to the home.

It is difficult to draw conclusions from such a small sample of studies. However, the literature appears to indicate that there are no significant differences between employed and non-employed women in the area of role conflict. This area is a clear example of how roles for women have changed over the past decades. Clearly, there are many factors beyond employment status which influence a woman's experience of role conflict.

Marital Problems

Psychological stress may show itself in terms of marital problems. Often the researchers expected to find that employed

women would have more marital problems than non-employed women. The different studies of marital adjustment found no differences between employed and non-employed women (Houseknecht and Macke, 1981; Stains, Peck, Shepherd, and O'Conner, 1978). Employed wives were found to have no less companionship and marital adjustment than their non-employed counterparts (Locksley, 1980). Similarly, when general marital satisfaction was also considered, there were no differences between employed and non-employed women (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970; Suchet and Barling, 1986). This was true even when the factor of high work commitment compared to low work commitment was considered for employed women (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970).

The incidence of separation and divorce was another variable for which employed and non-employed women have been compared. Booth, Johnson, and White (1984) expected to find that employment for women would increase the incidence of separation and divorce. They discovered that employed and non-employed married women showed no difference in marital instability as measured by thoughts or occurence of separation or divorce. However, when the number of hours worked was taken into consideration, results were produced in the expected direction. Women who worked more than 40 hours a week had higher rates of separation and divorce.

On the other hand, one study indicates that employment enhances marital satisfaction. Employed women expressed more happiness with their marriage and indicated that they communicated more with their husbands than did non-employed

wives. However, there was a significant interaction with the husband's report of marital happiness. The husbands of employed women reported more unhappiness with their marriages than did husbands of non-employed women. This was in contrast to employed women reporting greater marital satisfaction (Burke and Weir, 1976). This indicates a more complicated picture in the area of marital happiness than can be determined by evaluating the wives' opinions alone.

The research which was available indicates that there are either no differences in marital adjustment based on employment status, or that employed women have greater marital adjustment. These results were not in the expected direction. Further investigation into the husband's report is warranted as is evidenced by the Burke and Weir (1976) study.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a concept which is difficult to define. In some respects, all of the studies previously discussed could be defined as measuring life satisfaction to some degree. However, there were two studies which used "life satisfaction" as a dependent variable. Life satisfaction appears to be equal for employed and non-employed women and it tends to decrease for both groups of women as time pressures increase (Ferree, 1984). Wright's (1978) review of six national studies found that there were no consistent differences between the two groups of women in the area of life satisfaction. He concluded that there were other more significant factors which contributed to life satisfaction than employment alone.

While these results are not conclusive and further study is needed in this area, it appears that employment status alone does not affect women's reports of life satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction

While job satisfaction is commonly thought to apply only to the employment setting outside the home, it applies as well to domestic jobs (Ferree, 1984). Throughout this paper the term job satisfaction will apply to both outside employment and housework.

Three studies investigated the job satisfaction levels for employed and non-employed women. All of these studies concurred that there were no differences in satisfaction levels between these groups. Weaver and Holmes (1975) found that both groups of women were equally satisfied with their jobs whether it was full-time employment or full-time housekeeping. The other two studies have examined satisfaction with housekeeping for both groups of women. Women in both groups were equally disinterested in housework, though employed women tended to place a greater level of relative importance on the task of housework than did non-employed women (Lovell-Troy, 1983; Newberry, et al., 1979). It appears from these studies that job satisfaction, whether it is housework or outside employment, does not differ based on employment status.

Anxiety

The studies on anxiety have outcomes which indicate significant differences between the two groups of women. The only study which did not find differences was one which compared

employed and non-employed womens' anxiety about being separated from their firstborn infant. DeMeis, Hock, and McBride (1986) found that employment status did not significantly affect the level of separation anxiety of mothers from their firstborn infant. The important factor affecting separation anxiety was a woman's preference for employment. The women who preferred to be employed and were employed had an earlier and greater decline in their separation anxiety than women who preferred not to be employed and were employed. The same results were obtained when women who preferred to be and were non-employed were compared to non-employed women who preferred to be employed. Congruence between preference and practice was the key for both groups.

Housewives who have multiple roles, such as involvement in various school and community activities in addition to domestic management, and who feel a sense of being overloaded, are generally more anxious than their counterparts who are employed. The source of this difference in anxiety levels was unclear in the research. Barnett and Baruch (1985) hypothesized that being employed may act as a buffer against stress for women. Other studies found similar results: women who were employed scored lower on measures of worry (Burke and Weir, 1976), and anxiety (Walker and Walker, 1980).

An explanation for these findings might be that the non-employed woman has her roles less well defined than the employed woman. Often the non-employed woman is expected to volunteer for a variety of projects in the community and to carry the full weight of household and childrearing responsibilities because

she is "not working." The employed woman has more definition to her hours in a day and thus may be protected to some degree from the constant demands around her. Definition of roles was not a controlled variable in any of the studies. The overwhelming data in this area suggests that women who are non-employed do have anxiety levels which are higher than working women.

Summary

While it has been commonly assumed that either employment or non-employment produces greater stress for married women (Yogev, 1983), the majority of the research does not support this conclusion. In fact, most of the research supports the conclusion that levels of psychological stress were equal for both groups of women. The exception to this is the research in the area of anxiety which indicated that there were differences. More anxiety is experienced by non-employed women. The varying findings in the research may be due to the fact that our rapidly changing values surrounding the issue of women and employment has created a wide variety of opinion. Consequently, research in the area of women, employment status, and stress is merely reflecting the current state of flux. Changes in the results of research over time support this conclusion.

In general, the research indicates that culture as a whole appears to be adapting fairly well to women's employment. Despite this, some individual women do continue to experience stress associated with their employment status. This may be explained by factors other than whether or not they work outside of the home, factors which when combined with a woman's

employment status create stress. When individual differences are examined, these important factors may become apparent. The next section discusses in detail three of these important factors.

EFFECTS OF CONGRUENCE - INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

In western culture people sense the need for autonomy and self-determination. People are more satisfied with their lives when they feel a sense of personal control. This need is equally present in old and young, male and female. Women are making more self-determined choices today than they were a century ago. One aspect of a married woman's life in which she has more choice than at any other time in history is whether or not she will work outside of the home. There are a multitude of factors which influence her choice.

Recently, researchers have begun to investigate in more detail the factors which are involved in a woman's choice of employment status and how that choice affects her. A portion of this literature includes some studies which examine the impact which congruent and incongruent choices have on a married woman's psychological stress level. Investigators have been interested in researching whether choices which are congruent with a variety of factors in a woman's life create more or less stress for her. Similarly, they have been interested in understanding the effects of incongruent choices. The areas in which a woman might be congruent are within herself, with her immediate interpersonal environment, and with societal norms.

This section will consider three areas in which congruence

of employment status choice and its affects on a woman's stress level have been researched. First, research covering congruence between a woman's personal desires, goals, and aspirations regarding her employment status and her actual employment status is addressed. Second, research investigating a woman's congruence with her husband's preference for her employment status is covered. The research concerning congruence with societal norms regarding a woman's employment status is the third area discussed.

It should be kept in mind that none of these three areas are mutually exclusive, but instead, they are correlated. They may overlap and to some extent they each influence the other. There may be a ripple effect, with one area gradually influencing the other areas. The more frequently women choose employment, the more societal norms change in acceptance of women's employment. Similarly, societal norms impact women's desires for employment status as can be seen by the increased acceptance by society of women's employment and the increasing numbers of women who choose to work. Societal norms also have an impact on the husband's preference, and the preference of husbands in turn may impact societal norms and a wife's desires. In addition, there may be additive effects of each of these areas. Lack of congruence in only one area may have less impact than lack of congruence in all areas. While the most complete way to understand individual differences would be to investigate the effects of all three factors in one study, this has not been attempted.

Personal Desires

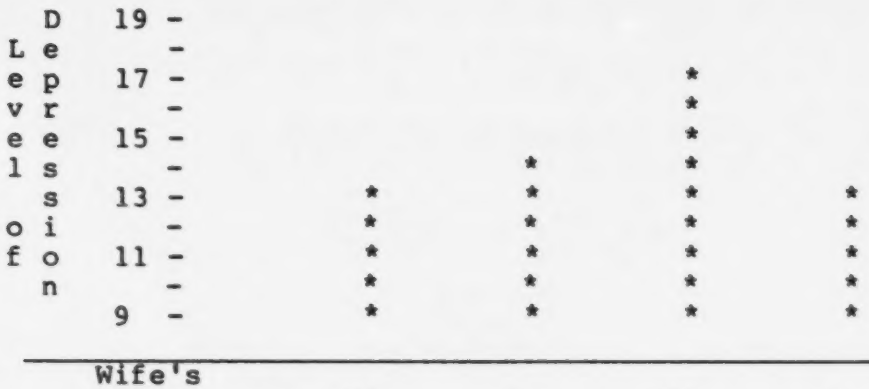
A woman's personal desire to be employed and its affect on her psychological stress has been one area of investigation. This area has been of theoretical interest to some researchers, who upon finding no significant differences in their empirical investigations of employed versus non-employed groups, have proposed in the discussion section that an investigation of women's individual personal desires would be more profitable (Locksley, 1980; Newberry, et al., 1979; Wright,1978). While much speculation and theory in this area has been offered, relatively little research has been conducted. Three areas which have been addressed are the effects of congruence or conflict on a woman's psychological well-being, marital adjustment, and job satisfaction.

Psychological Well-Being Psychological well-being can be measured in a variety of ways. Studies have looked at depression levels, life satisfaction, separation anxiety, and general psychological health as indicators of psychological well-being.

In the area of depression, women who experienced a conflict between desired and actual employment status had higher self-report depression rates than women whose desires were congruent with their actual employment status (Krause and Geyer-Pestello, 1985). Congruence between desire and actual role was found to affect not only the woman but also her husband, producing lower depression levels for both as indicated in Figure 1, replicated from Ross, et al. (1983). It shows the level of depression for

the wife as a function of preferred and actual employment status.

Figure 1: The Effects of Wives' Employment Status and Preferences on the Depression Levels of Wives.



The chart indicates that the lowest levels of depression in women occured when their employment status matched their preference. Women who were non-employed and who wished to be employed were significantly more depressed than all the other groups of women. The effects for employed women who wish to be non-employed were not significant, but they were in the expected direction. There does not appear to be the same amount of stress for employed women associated with congruence or conflict of personal desires as there is for non-employed women. Perhaps employment is a relatively satisfactory status for women whether or not they want to be employed. There were no available statistics in this study on the interactive effects of a

husband's preference concerning his wife's employment status with respect to the wife's level of depression.

In a related study, Hall and Gordon (1973) investigated life satisfaction. Women who did not want to be employed and were able to stay at home were more satisfied with their lives than non-employed women who desired to be employed. However, the affects of congruency were not found to be as important for employed women. Employed women who desired to be non-employed were less satisfied than employed women who wanted to work, but the differences were not found to be significant. This finding appears to support the conclusions found by Ross et al. (1983) illustrated in Figure 1, which indicate that congruency may be more important for non-employed women.

Differences between the two non-employed groups included satisfaction with housekeeping and childcare. Women who wanted to be employed but stayed at home because of their husband's wishes were more dissatisfied with housekeeping and childcare roles than women who stayed at home because it was congruent with their expectations and desires (Krause, 1983).

In the area of separation anxiety, a mother's anxiety about leaving her first born child was influenced by the degree to which she was being congruent with her desires for employment status. Mothers who were incongruent with their preference were more anxious about leaving their children than those who were congruent (De Meis, et al., 1986). This indicates that a woman's sense of psychological well-being after the birth of the first child, as expressed through separation anxiety, is

affected by her congruence with her desires for employment.

The findings on congruence appear to generalize across cultures. Married Mexican-American women whose employment status was congruent with their desires benefitted psychologically from employment. Women who were involved in roles which were congruent with their personal desires had lower depression levels, higher levels of positive affect, fewer somatic complaints, and better interpersonal relationships. (Krause and Markides, 1985).

It appears that a woman's personal preference moderates the effect of employment on psychological well-being. Congruency between a woman's actual employment status and her personal desires for employment may have an affect on her depression level, life satisfaction, separation anxiety, and general psychological health.

Marital Adjustment A second area which might be impacted by a woman's congruence between her employment status and her personal desires is marital adjustment. Two articles have reported investigations in this area.

Women whose employment status was in accordance with their desires had higher levels of general marital adjustment, higher levels of marital satisfaction and happiness, and reports of fewer arguments (Ridley, 1973). This was true for both employed and non-employed wives. In a study by Hardesty and Betz (1980) of career women, high levels of marital satisfaction were associated with women who had high career commitment.

These results would tend to indicate that marital

adjustment, as reported by the wife, can be impacted by the degree to which a woman's employment status is congruent with her personal desires. This does not take into account a variety of other potentially intervening variables such as the husband's report of marital adjustment. Marital adjustment, as reported by the husband, is often a very different story as discussed in the study by Burke and Weir (1976) in the first section of this paper.

Job Satisfaction Unfortunately, the research to date has only investigated the affects of congruency with personal desires on job satisfaction for employed women. A woman's attitude toward working was positive if she desired to be employed and was either currently in that role or anticipated to be in that role in the near future (Haller and Rosenmayer, 1971). In addition, Ridley (1973) found that employed women who were working according to their desires had higher job satisfaction than women who were working against their desires. Whether or not these results would hold true for job satisfaction in the home is an area for future research. The Lovell-Troy (1983) and Newberry et al., (1979) studies in the first section would point to the fact that this may not be the case for household jobs.

Though there is a need for more research, it does appear that if a woman is employed and her preference is to be non-employed, her level of stress increases, and likewise for non-employed women who want to be employed. It appears that the examination of women's personal desires for employment status is

an area which can contribute to our knowledge in the area of married women, employment status, and psychological stress.

Husband's Preference

A husband's preference may be one of the factors which influences the level of psychological stress which a woman experiences. Her degree of congruence with his preference has been studied from two different perspectives in the literature. The first approach was taken by those who have examined the effects of a husband's level of supportiveness on his wife's stress level and employment status. The second approach has been to examine the affects of congruence between the wife's employment status and her husband's preference in the areas of role conflict, depression, marital adjustment, and job satisfaction. As a whole, this area has received less attention than the areas of personal preference and societal norms.

Husband's Supportiveness A husband's attitude and degree of supportiveness can have an effect on the amount of stress which his wife experiences as well as on her actual decision regarding employment status. Lack of husband's supportiveness correlated with high levels of stress experienced by farmers' wives (Berkowitz and Perkins, 1984, 1985). Wives of husbands who were perceived as being generally supportive experienced less role conflict than wives of husbands who were perceived as not supportive (Holahan and Gilbert, 1979).

Arnott (1972) and Waite (1986) found that a husband's attitude had an impact on the role in which a woman was involved. For example, if the husband preferred his wife to be

employed, she usually was employed. From this data they assumed that a husband's preference impacted the decision-making process of his wife. However, Arnott (1972) found that a woman's desires regarding employment was a more significant factor on her decision than her husband's preference. This was found to be true for women with high, moderate, and low degrees of autonomy.

In examining the congruence issue, it is not only what the wife wants, but also what the husband wants that influences whether or not a wife will be employed. Therefore, studies which consider the husbands preference are important in this investigation. However, it appears that while a husband's attitude may have an effect on the choices a wife makes about her employment status, it is not to the extent of overriding her own desires.

Congruence with Husband's Preference Only a limited amount of research has been conducted which directly measured the affects of a woman's congruence in her employment status with her husband's preference. These few studies have investigated the areas of role conflict, depression for both the wife and the husband, job satisfaction, and marital conflict.

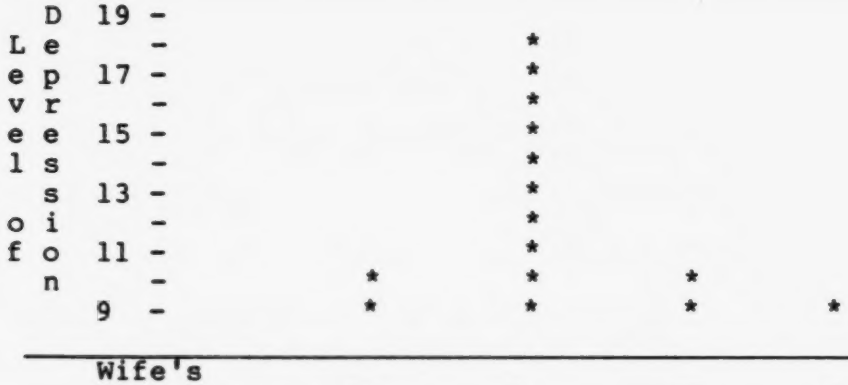
Buetell and Greenhaus (1982) investigated the differences in levels of role conflict for the women who were or were not congruent with their husbands' preferences concerning their employment status. The degree of conflict experienced by a woman between her various roles is believed to be one indicator of psychological stress. Women whose priorities concerning

employment were congruent with their husbands' priorities experienced less role conflict. This consensus between the spouses correlated with lower levels of role conflict for the wife whether or not she was employed. The highest level of conflict occurred among women who desired to be employed and were non-employed and whose husbands did not want them to be employed (Krause, 1983). This appears to support the findings by Hall and Gordon (1973) and Ross et al. (1983) discussed above.

The examination of congruence on depression levels was undertaken by Krause (1982) who found that symptoms of depression were experienced to a greater degree by women whose role status was in conflict with their spouses' preferences. For example, women who desired to be employed or were actually employed against their husbands' preferences had higher levels of depression than women who were employed in accordance with their husbands' preferences. The results were found to be true as well for women who were non-employed.

An interesting effect on husbands' depression levels was noticed in a study by Ross, et al. (1983). The chart in Figure 2 indicates that when the wife's actual status was not congruent with the husband's desires, his depression level was higher. The results were especially significant if she was employed and he did not want her to be employed.

Figure 2: The Interactive Effects of Wives' Employment Status and Preferences for Employment on the Depression Levels of Husbands.



The impact of congruence on job satisfaction was another area which was studied. Houseknecht and Macke (1981) investigated the effects on the level of job satisfaction if a wife was congruent with her husband's preference. They discovered that job satisfaction was correlated with the degree of consensus between husband and wife regarding the employment status of the wife.

Finally, Hardesty and Betz (1980) examined a husband's preference for his wife's employment status, her congruence with his preference, and how this affected the marital adjustment of the couple. It was found that a husband's attitudes towards his wife's roles were unrelated to marital adjustment.

From the limited amount of studies which have investigated

the affects of a woman's congruence or conflict with her husband's preference, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. However, it is apparent that congruence with a husband's preference is an important area which does affect the stress levels in married women. Further research will be needed to determine the nature of those effects on married women.

Societal Norms

Congruence with societal norms is a third area which may impact a woman's stress level. It is a well known fact that social norms have a significant influence on us. If the norms of society or of the individual community in which a woman lived were in favor of her being non-employed, then she tended to conform her desires to that norm and not seek employment. Likewise, if the community around her highly valued employment for the woman, she tended to desire and seek employment (Ferree, 1984). While this area would appear to be an area of critical importance in increasing our understanding of what affects a women's stress level, it has received little attention. The little research which has examined women's congruence with societal norms has investigated affects on psychological well-being, marital adjustment, and job satisfaction.

Psychological Well-Being General psychological health, happiness, stress levels, depression, and interpersonal conflicts are all potential measures of psychological well-being. The researchers who have investigated this area have looked at these areas to determine whether or not they are affected by congruency with societal norms.

Psychologically, women benefitted from employment only if employment was consistent with their perception of what was appropriate behavior. If employment was not consistent with her perception of norms, a woman's general psychological health was negatively impacted (Haw, 1982; Kessler and McRae, 1982). In addition, a woman's happiness was affected by congruence with perceived social norms. Women whose employment status was seen by them as socially desirable scored higher on self-reports of happiness than women whose employment status was not seen as socially desirable. This was apparently due to the fact that they suffered less role conflict and guilt from incongruency with perceived societal norms (Ferree, 1984).

In a study by Berkowitz and Perkins (1984), stress in women who were either congruent or in conflict with societal norms was examined. Women who were experiencing conflicts between societal norms and actual roles had higher levels of stress. This was found both for women who were mainly engaged in housework (non-employment) as well as for those who were employed outside the home.

In the area of depression and interpersonal problems, similar results were found. Mexican-American women who did not hold to the traditional societal norms of non-employment had significantly higher levels of depression and interpersonal difficulties (Krause and Markides, 1985).

It appears from the data that conflict between social norms and employment status can affect a woman in terms of her perceived happiness, stress and depression levels, and

interpersonal relationships. Thus, a woman's psychological well-being is affected in a positive manner when there is congruence between her employment status and societal norms.

Marital Adjustment There has been only one study to date which has investigated congruency with societal norms of appropriate employment status for women and the affects on marital adjustment. In a study of professional women by Houseknecht and Macke (1981), it appears that marital adjustment might be better for women who are congruent with societal norms. Professional women who perceived employment as being consistent with social expectations had better marital adjustment than those who did not. This study did not include the husband's report of marital adjustment which might indicate different results.

Job Satisfaction As with marital adjustment, there was only one study found which examined congruency with societal norms and its affects on job satisfaction. The study investigated job satisfaction only as it related to the employment setting. Employed women in Austria who came from "occupational communities" (villages in which employment for women in the textile industry had been the norm for several generations) scored higher on job satisfaction than did employed women who came from "non-occupational communities" (Haller and Rosenmayer, 1971). This study indicates that employed women who go against the long established societal norms may experience lower job satisfaction, at least if they belong to non-occupational communities. Whether this is true for women who

are parts of occupational communities and choose non-employment was not investigated in this study.

While the data is limited and on occasions leaves important questions unaddressed, it appears from these initial studies that congruency with societal norms is an important factor which may contribute to a woman's psychological well-being, marital adjustment, and job satisfaction. For some married women, congruence with societal norms or lack thereof may impact their psychological stress level. Clearly, this area is in need of further research which would investigate other factors which influence psychological stress levels.

Summary

While only a few studies have examined individual differences in the area of married women, employment status, and psychological stress, it appears that they have contributed significantly to this field of study. The one area in which most of the research has been conducted, woman's congruence with her personal desire, has produced interesting material indicating that this may be one of the keys to understanding psychological stress in married women as a function of employment status. In addition, this may lead to understanding stress in other areas for women such as the decision to become married or to become a parent.

The other areas of investigation, congruence with societal norms and husband's preference, appear to be potentially fruitful in furthering understanding of factors affecting stress. It is apparent that the work needs to be continued in

the area of individual differences in order to understand and apply our knowledge in treatment and intervention.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A literature review not only indicates the past and current status of a topic of research, but it also points out those areas which need improvement and those which have been neglected. The research which has been produced in the area of married women, employment status, and psychological stress is lacking in two respects. Firstly, there is a lack of conceptual cohesiveness; secondly, there were several areas which are potentially important but have had little attention. These problems are addressed in this section of the paper.

In part one, lack of cohesiveness is addressed by discussing specific problems with the current research along with suggestions for ways in which future research might be improved. This includes a conceptual critique of the body of research reviewed in this paper.

The second part of this section includes a discussion of the areas which have received little or no attention and which appear to be of critical importance toward the understanding of married women, employment status, and stress. This includes several specific suggestions for future research and a conceptual framework for continued study in the area of congruence.

Conceptual Critique

While a great deal of literature has been generated in the area of married women, employment status, and psychological

stress, it is clear that it lacked conceptual cohesiveness. Some of this lack of cohesiveness is due to the fact that the studies which were reviewed differed from one another in one of five major ways.

The first difference was in the types of groups of women who were studied. For example, some studies dealt exclusively with married women with children while other studies looked only at single women. Similarly, some of the researchers made careful distinctions concerning the marital and parental status of the women, while in other studies no distinctions were made.

The second way the studies differed from one another was in the definition of employment status. Most studies did not define the term "employment", nor did they clarify in which category the women who were studied belonged. There are a variety of categories which the term "employment" might include, such as: full-time versus part-time, career versus temporary, professional versus blue collar. Some of the reseachers who did make distinctions have been noted above.

A third difference was in the type of measures used by the researchers, which ranged from relatively unstructured interviews to highly standardized objective tests. Some of the researchers designed their own studies while others used data which had been collected previously in new ways to gather information.

A fourth difference between the studies was the wide variety of dependent variable(s) which were examined. While the same variable may have been used in two different studies, each

researcher defined that variable differently. For example, one study defined depression as a general feeling of disphoria, while another defined it as a condition which requires hospitalization. Despite the apparent diversity in the conceptual variables, all of them were chosen because they fit under the umbrella of "psychological stress".

The final way in which the studies differed was in the overall assumptions with which the researchers approached the investigations. In general, two main approaches were used. The first approach assumed that employment status in married women was the determining factor which produced differential effects in the levels of psychological stress. Most researchers who used this approach attempted to find supporting evidence that employed women experience more psychological stress than non-employed married women, or vice-versa. The second approach grew out of an assumption that employment status alone is not enough to produce psychological stress in married women. These researchers investigated internal and external pressures and demands which influence a woman's psychological stress level. In general, they tended to assume that women, just as men, are not stressed solely by their employment status. While these approaches are fundamentally different, they each contribute to furthering our knowledge of married women, employment status, and stress.

In addition to these five differences, no replication studies were found in the literature. The entire area of investigation would be more cohesive and definitive if

replication studies were performed on some of the more significant research.

New Directions

There are several areas of research on married women, employment, and stress which have yet to be investigated or have received only minor attention. In reviewing the literature, it is apparent that several of the areas which have been investigated would profit from further studies. Below are a few of the areas in which the need for further investigation is most evident.

Most of the research has been involved in comparing employed to non-employed women. There is need for continuing research of this type. This is due to the fact that the present research suffers from the lack of conceptual cohesiveness mentioned above. In addition, as our society continues to change, there will always be the need for follow up research to account for changes in the data with respect to societal influences. Numerous studies yielding statistically significant data have been conducted in the areas of depression, role conflict, and marital adjustment, but in the areas of alienation, job satisfaction, and anxiety, not many studies have been conclusive. It can be expected that further comparisons of employed and non-employed women, especially in the areas in which little work has been accomplished, will advance our knowledge of stress in married women.

The investigation of individual differences is generally in need of further research. While a woman's congruency with her

personal desire, husband's preference, and societal norms has begun to be explored, more reserach is needed in broader areas. This might include the investigation of congruency with respect to a woman's intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal worlds.

In addition to the topics already investigated, congruence in a woman's intrapersonal world might include such issues as maturity, autonomy, locus of control, or stage in the life-cycle. Women who consider their families complete tend to be employed more often than newly married women or women who are expecting more children (Hall, 1975; Waite, 1986).

Congruence in a woman's interpersonal world should consider more than her husband, because often there are parents, siblings, and children which impact her (Smith, 1981; Yogev, 1982). Krause and Geyer-Pestello (1985) found that the presence of young children at home made a difference in a woman's sex role beliefs, with women more likely to stay at home if they had young children.

Congruence in a woman's societal world should include her immediate community as well as the larger context. Research in this area might investigate the impact of religious and political beliefs, cultural influences, and economic considerations.

Research in the area of individual differences should consider the fact that stress can produce incongruence and incongruence can produce stress. For example, a woman's stress level may be elevated due to intrapsychic conflict, interpersonal conflict, or societal conflict, independently or

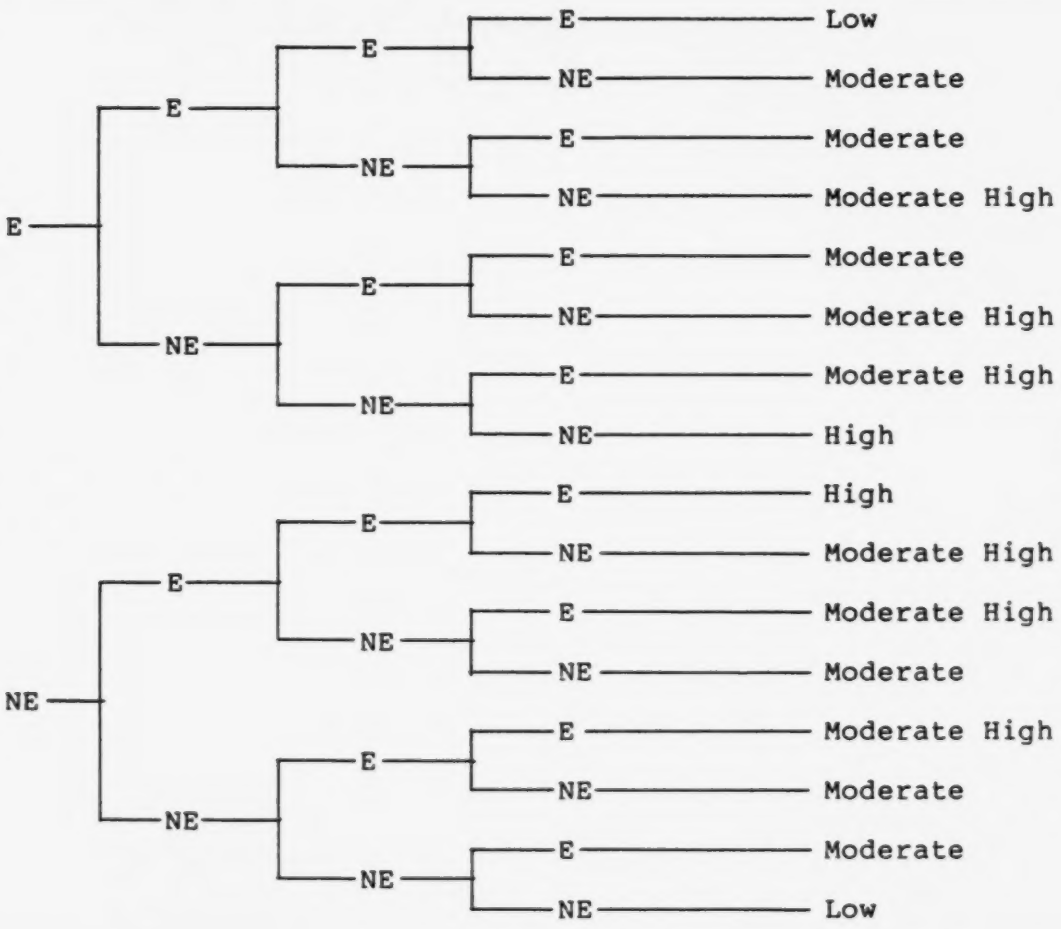
in combination. Similarly, she might be experiencing one of these various conflicts due to the level of stress which is being produced in another area.

Finally, the synergistic affects of personal desires, societal norms, and husband's preference have yet to be explored. There appears to be a great deal of overlap and interrelationship between these three areas. One direction for future research is the investigation of the additive and interactive effects of these three areas on the stress level of married women. Figure 3, which is conceptual in nature, diagrammatically indicates the potentially additive affects which theoretically might produce differing levels of stress in women.

Figure 3 indicates that a woman who is in an employment status which is incongruent with her desires, societal norms, and her husband's preference may experience higher levels of stress than a woman who is congruent in all but one of these areas. It may be that one area in particular has a greater impact on women in general or women who have particular personality types. It should be noted that the stress levels indicated for the various combinations of factors may not necessarily be equal in intensity. For example, the current research has indicated that a non-employed woman who desires to be employed (Hall and Gordon, 1973; Ross et al., 1983) and whose husband expects or prefers her to be non-employed (Krause, 1983), experiences a particularly high level of stress. Consequently, the experienced stress level may in fact be higher

in this case than for other scenarios that indicate a "moderate" or "moderate high" potential stress level.

Figure 3: Factors Involved in Employment and Stress



E = Employed
NE = Not employed

Summary

In general, the research to date has been troubled by the inability to provide definitive conclusions. This may be corrected by more carefully defining the parameters of research

in order to establish conceptual cohesiveness. Directions for future research should include the replication of studies that have yielded statistically significant results. In addition, a potentially valuable area for new research is the study of congruence between a variety of factors in the stress level of women.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A critical review of the empirical literature and agenda for future research in the area of married women, employment status, and psychological stress was undertaken in this paper. It was found that there have been two basic approaches to research: those studies which have conducted investigations comparing employed and non-employed women and those which have conducted investigations exploring individual differences.

The data comparing the two groups of women tends to indicate that there are no significant differences in psychological stress between employed and non-employed women. The exception to this was the area of anxiety in which it was found that non-employed women have higher levels of anxiety. From this data it appears that employment status alone does not account for stress levels in married women. The data presented by those investigating individual differences found that other factors combined with employment status influenced a married woman's stress level. Personal desire, societal norms, and husband's preference about a woman's employment status were studied to determine if they combined with actual employment status to affect stress. Although the research is relatively

limited, it does appear that a conflict in one of these areas produces higher levels of psychological stress.

An examination of the problems which previous research had encountered was presented. In addition, suggestions for areas of further investigation were discussed. This included a conceptual framework for future study of individual differences.

In conclusion, it is clear that this is a transistional period in the study of women and stress. As women become more involved in the work force for reasons which include such factors as personal autonomy and financial necessity, there will be ramifications for individuals, marriages, and society as a whole. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations in this paper will provide a basis for continued research to enable more comprehensive understanding of married women, employment status, and stress.

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1986-1987	Psychological Assistant Life Dimensions, Los Alamitos, CA
1986-1987	Student Supervisor for Marriage and Family Intervention
1987	Student Supervisor for Psychoanalysis with Children